

WASHINGTON, DC –Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) and the U.S. House approved seven bills today aimed at bringing benefits and services for America's veterans in line with the significant sacrifice they have made in service to the nation. The legislative package builds upon a strong veterans agenda already moved by the House this year, including last week's passage of a 2008 budget resolution that increases funding for veterans' programs by \$6.7 billion over 2007 and \$3.6 billion more than the Administration's request.

"As Memorial Day approaches, it is important that we pay tribute to our nation's veterans, including the 470,000 in Maryland, by providing them with the benefits they need and the support deserve," stated Rep. Hoyer. "The legislative progress we have made with these seven bills is yet another step in making good on this nation's promise to honor our veterans not just with words, but with action commensurate with the great sacrifice these men and women have made in answering the nation's highest call to service."

The following seven bills passed on suspension with the support of at least two-thirds of the House:

1. Traumatic Brain Injury/Rural Veterans Outreach (H.R. 2199) ensures that veterans are properly screened for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, if diagnosed, receive appropriate treatment. More than half of combat casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan have associated brain injuries, often due to improvised explosive devices.
2. **Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act (H.R. 612)** extends the period of eligibility for health care for combat service in the Persian Gulf War or future hostilities from two years to five years after discharge or release.
3. **Veterans Outreach Improvement Act (H.R. 67)** allows the VA to partner with state and local governments to reach out to veterans and their families in ensuring they receive the benefits for which they are eligible and assist them in completing their benefits claims. Under this act, federal grants would be directed to states with large and growing populations of veterans.
4. **Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits Act (H.R. 2239)**

expands eligibility for vocational rehabilitation benefits administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

5. **Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act (H.R. 1470)** requires that chiropractic care and services be provided to veterans at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers within four years.

6. **H.R. 1660** directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in the southern Colorado region.

7. **H.R. 392** urges Americans and people of all nationalities to visit American cemeteries, memorials, and markers honoring veteran service to the nation.

In working to fulfill its commitment to the nation's veterans, the Democratic-led House has also passed a FY08 budget that provides the largest increase in veterans' health care in the nation's history and is supported by all of the major veterans' service organizations. In order to fill the gap created by shortfalls in this year's budget, the House is expected later this week to approve as part of the Iraq supplemental spending bill a \$2 billion installment of additional veterans funding.

Recognizing that the need for veterans' health care services is only expected to increase as more servicemen and women return from tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, the House has also passed the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act requiring improvements to the military medical care system, as well as other measures to address traumatic brain injury and mental health needs, which are growing problems among returning veterans.

"Already, in the first five months of the 110th Congress, the new majority has followed through with our pledge to honor the nation's commitment to our veterans," stated Rep. Hoyer. "These proud men and women to which we owe so much have fulfilled their duties bravely and honorably, and they deserve nothing less than the support of a nation that recognizes the heroic deeds they have undertaken to protect and promote the freedoms all Americans enjoy."

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